DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 193 675 CS 205 944

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TITLE State Competencies for Writing: Grades K-6. Technical Note.
INSTITUTION Southwest Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, Los Alamitos, Calif.
REPORT NO SWRL-TN-3-79-07
PUB DATE 30 Jun 79
NOTE 25p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Education: Evaluation Methods: *Minimum Competencies: *State Standards: *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

This paper contains descriptions of mandated minimum competency documents from seven states: Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Michigan, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas. Each description provides a picture of the general nature of the state requirements and a discussion of the specific writing skills requirements. The procedures used to compile a synthesized list of writing skills from the state documents are also discussed. The list of writing skills and assessment levels is appended. (FL)

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STATE COMPETENCIES FOR WRITING: GRADES K-6

Joseph Lawlor

ABSTRACT

The competency lists of seven states were reviewed, and a list of the writing skills and assessment levels presented in the state documents was compiled. This list is used to verify the importance of the skills contained in the writing component of the Language Skills Framework for the Entry/Exit Project.

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STATE COMPETENCIES FOR WRITING: GRADES K-6

Joseph Lawlor

In conjunction with the development of the writing component of a Language Skills Framework (LSF) for the Entry/Exit Project, an analysis of state-declared competencies for writing was undertaken. Competency lists from seven states were selected because they are currently available and because their skills are specific enough for comparison with the skills and assessment levels contained in the LSF. This paper describes the general nature of the state lists, the specific document of each state, and the procedures used to compile a synthesized list of writing skills from the state lists. This list of writing skills and assessment levels is presented in the appendix.

The State Documents

The competency lists of Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Michigan, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas were analyzed for specific writing skills. These lists present several major problems for analysis because of the generality and vagueness of their skill statements. Composition skills (i.e., skills relating to the planning, developing, and revising of complete texts) tend to be very general, while other writing skills, such as capitalization, spelling, and punctuation are much more specific. For example, Texas states that students should be proficient in "writing short descriptive and narrative paragraphs about everyday experiences." This statement covers two major discourse types, description and narration, but fails to specify the component skills which contribute to the production of either discourse type

(e.g., using spatial order for description; using chronological order for narration). At the same time, though, Texas is very specific in delineating skills for using commas (e.g., in dates, after yes and no, in direct address).

This inconsistency may be explained in part by the nature of the skills being described. The "mechanical" features of punctuation, capitalization, spelling, grammar, and usage facilitate specific skill definitions, but composition skills are not so easily defined. The state agencies seem to avoid the problem by simply combining all the composition skills into several general statements.

While general statements certainly pose problems for analysis, the vagueness of some statements in the documents makes skill identification impossible. Michigan's list includes the skill, "Write[s] a selection that demonstrates some understanding of sentence structure." Georgia requires that an elementary student "Be aware that his sentence patterns are important to himself, his classmates, and his teacher." Skill statements of this type are not just difficult to analyze; they are are impossible to assess.

A brief description of each state document is listed below, indicating the degree of specificity in the skill statements and the suggested grade levels for assessment.

Florida

Florida's document lists minimum competencies for assessment at the beginning of grades three and five. These competencies are presumed to be terminal for grades two and four. The skills are fairly specific

except for spelling and composition. Spelling skills refer to grade-level word lists (e.g., "The student will spell words from a selected high-frequency list of those words needed in writing through grade four"), and composition skills are general (e.g., "The student will write a paragraph expressing ideas clearly.").

Georgia

Georgia's document is a curriculum guide for kindergarten through sixth grade. It contains a large number of skills, most of which are either vague or general. Many skills are repeated across grade levels, but proficiency levels are rarely indicated. For example, the skill statement "Finds success in all handwriting activities" is listed for grades one through six, but the grade at which this "success" might be assessed is not specified.

Louisiana

Louisiana specifies minimum competencies for assessment at grades one through six. The skills are detailed and specific, particularly in composition, spelling, and handwriting, but the document suffers from comparatively late proficiency levels. For example, Louisiana indicates that the spelling of long and short vowels will be assessed in the fifth grade, while other states assess this skill in the third or fourth grade.

Oklahoma

Oklahoma provides a curriculum guide for grades one through six. The document contains two separate lists of specific skills, one list organized by skill type and the other organized by grade level. The

grade-leveling of skills, though, is not consistent across the two lists. For example, capitalization of the pronoun I appears as a first grade skill on one list and as a third grade skill on the other list. The higher grade levels were used in compiling the skills list in the appendix because these levels seemed more closely aligned with the specifications of the other states.

Tennessee

Tennessee lists "expectations" of competency for kindergarten through sixth grade. The document cautions that the skill lists are not to be used as criteria for promotion. Except for composition, the skills are fairly specific. Composition skills are either vague (e.g., "The student can write creatively about selected subjects"), or they are general (e.g., "The student can develop simple original paragraphs").

Texas

Texas indicates minimum competencies for "primary" and "intermediate" levels. These are assumed to be terminal competencies for grades three and six, respectively. The objectives are not stated in terms of specific skills because they are called "program goals," and defining specific skills is left to the local districts.

Compiling the Skills List

Compiling and cross-referencing the state skill lists required several procedures. First, the state lists were analyzed for specific

writing skills. Skills which relate to the areas of reading or oral language were not considered in this survey even though they are often included in the state documents as writing or "language arts" competencies. For example, Louisiana includes "Expresses opinions and viewpoint (orally)" as a writing competency even though this is clearly a speaking skill. Tennessee specifies "The student can use indexes to find needed information" as a writing competency when it seems more appropriate to reading.

Once the writing skills were identified, the state skill statements were reworded for inclusion in the appendix. For example, the skill "Writes compound sentences" appears in the appendix as specified by Tennessee and Texas. The original wording of the skill in the state documents is:

> The student can form compound sentences.
> (Tennessee)
>
> The program should provide opportunities for the student to develop ability in making sentence choices in writing by using compound and complex sentence construction.*
> (Texas)

Rewording the statements, then, facilitates cross-referencing the skills and provides the necessary clarity and brevity.

Certain skills in the state lists, however, are so vague that it is impossible to determine the exact definition of the skill from the skill statement (e.g., "The student can write creatively about selected subjects," Tennessee). Any attempt to reword these skills

*The "complex" element of the Texas statement appears as a separate skill in the appendix.

would require an inappropriate degree of interpretation and would impose specificity that is not present in the state documents. Therefore, these extremely vague skills were not included in the appendix.

After the skills were analyzed and reworded, they were listed in the hierarchical format developed for the writing component of the LSF (Humes, 1979, pp. 26-43). This arrangement facilitates comparison of the skills and assessment levels in the state lists and the LSF.

References

Florida: Student assessment objectives. Tallahassee: State of Florida Department of Education, 1977.

Georgia: A design for an English curriculum. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Education, 1968.

Humes, A. Literary skills - writing (working paper). Los Alamitos, California: SWRL Educational Research and Development, 1979.

Louisiana: Louisiana minimum standards for writing, grades 1-12 (draft). Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Department of Education, 1978.

Michigan: Communication skills objectives (draft). Lansing, Michigan: Michigan Department of Education, 1978.

Oklahoma: Oklahoma Curriculum Improvement Commission. Teaching guide for the language arts, grades 1-13. Oklahoma City: Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1963.

Tennessee: Tennessee Education Association. Student expectations in the basic skills, K-6. Nashville: Tennessee Department of Education, 1978.

Texas: Division of Educational Assessment. Program goals K-12: English language arts curriculum. Austin: Texas Education Agency, 1978.

APPENDIX

WRITING SKILLS AND ASSESSMENT LEVELS ACROSS SEVEN STATES

This Appendix lists the writing skills compiled from an analysis and synthesis of seven state competency lists. Letters in the grade columns indicate the assessment levels specified by each state:

F = Florida

G - Georgia

L = Louisiana

M = Michigan

O = Oklahoma

TN = Tennessee

TX = Texas

SKILLS AT THE WORD PART LEVEL	Grade Level for Assessment						
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
HANDWRITING							
Readiness							
1. Manipulates large marking crayons, paint brushes, and scissors.	TN,G	L					
2. Demonstrates left to right and top to bottom orientation.		L					
3. Traces circles and lines (slant, straight).		L					
4. Traces shapes (circle, triangle, square, rectangle, half circle).		L					
5. Follows mazes.		L					
6. Reproduces shapes (circle, triangle, square, rectangle, half circle).		L					
7. Holds and uses a primary pencil correctly.		TN,G	L				
Manuscript							
1. Uses correct paper position and posture for manuscript writing.		TN	L				
2. Identifies and traces manuscript letters.		L					
3. Writes lower-case and upper-case manuscript letters.		TN,O	L,F				
4. Writes numbers (1-10).		L	F				
5. Reduces size of letters.				TX			

SKILLS AT THE WORD PART LEVEL (cont.)	Grade Level for Assessment						
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
Cursive							
1. Identifies all upper-case and lower-case cursive forms.				TX,L	F		
2. Uses correct paper position and alignment for writing lower-case and upper-case cursive letters.				TN	L,F		TX
3. Uses uniform size and shape of cursive letters.				G	TN		TX
SPELLING							
Sound Discrimination							
1. Identifies words that have the same initial sound.		L					
Consonants							
1. Spells initial consonant sounds.				O	G,L		
2. Spells final consonant sounds.					G	L	
3. Spells initial consonant clusters.							L
4. Spells initial and final consonant digraphs.				O	G		L
5. Spells silent consonants.				O			L
6. Spells variant sounds of c and g as cat and cent, gentle and go.				O			L
Vowels							
1. Spells short-vowel sounds.				O	G	L	
2. Spells long-vowel sounds.				O	G	L	

SKILLS AT THE WORD PART LEVEL (cont.)	Grade Level for Assessment						
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vowels (continued)							
3. Spells words containing the ie/ei digraph.							TX
4. Spells variant vowel sounds: /ô/ as in ball, saw, caught; /ū/ as in food, moon, pool; /ů/ as in book, foot, stood.					0		L
Miscellaneous							
1. Spells common prefixes/suffixes.						0	TN,0

SKILLS AT THE WORD/PHRASE LEVEL	Grade Level for Assessment						
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
HANDWRITING							
Manuscript							
1. Writes name and simple words in manuscript with correct letter formation and spacing.		O,TN	L,F	TX			
Cursive							
1. Uses proper spacing between letters/words in cursive.				G,O			TX
SPELLING							
Sound Discrimination							
1. Spells words that rhyme.				TN			
Vowels							
1. Spells phonetically regular words with the CVC pattern.				O		L	
2. Spells one-syllable words with the V-C-final e spelling pattern.				O,G			L
Prefixes							
1. Spells new words by adding prefixes.						G	TN,G
Suffixes							
1. Spells plurals of nouns by adding -s.			F,G	L,O			
2. Spells plurals of nouns by adding -es.			F,G	O		L	
3. Spells verbs with -ing.		G		TX,O	L		
4. Spells past tense forms of verbs with -ed ending.		G		O			L

SKILLS AT THE WORD/PHRASE LEVEL (cont.)	Grade Level for Assessment						
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
Suffixes (contined)							
5. Spells new words by adding derivational suffixes.						G	TN,G
Suffixation Processes							
1. Spells new words by changing y to i when adding suffixes.				G			
2. Spells new words by dropping final e when adding suffixes.					O		L,TX
3. Spells new words by doubling the final consonant when adding suffixes.					O	G	TX
Miscellaneous							
1. Spells common contractions.				M,TX TN	F,O		L
2. Spells compound words.					[illegible]	L,TX	
3. Spells high frequency words.			F	L,TN	F		L
4. Spells common abbreviations.					TN		TX
5. Spells own address.			L		F		
6. Spells the basic color words.				L			
7. Spells the number names through 10.				L			
8. Spells the number names through 100.							L
9. Spells the days of the week.			TN		L		
10. Spells the months of the year.			TN		L		

SKILLS AT THE WORD/PHRASE LEVEL (cont.)	Grade Level for Assessment						
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
MECHANICS							
Capitalization							
1. Capitalizes proper nouns:				M,TX	TN		
a. days of week			L,O		F		
b. months			L,O		F		
c. holidays			L		O		
d. streets, towns, states		G		L,O	F		
e. persons and pets		O,G		L	F		
2. Capitalizes proper adjectives.						O	
3. Capitalizes pronoun I.		G	F	L,M,O			
4. Capitalizes first letter in titles.		G			F,O		
5. Capitalizes first letter in initials and abbreviations.				L,TX	F,O		
6. Capitalizes first word in greeting and closing of letters.					F	O	M
Punctuation							
1. Uses comma in dates.			G	L,M	F,TN,O		TX
2. Uses comma between city and state.			G	L,M	TN,F,O		
3. Uses comma after greeting and closing of letters.			G	L	O,F		TX,M
4. Uses period at the end of abbreviations and initials.				TX	O,F		M
5. Uses apostrophe in possessives.			TN,O				M
6. Uses colon after greeting in business letters.					O		
7. Uses colon for time designation.				L			TN,M TX

SKILLS AT THE WORD/PHRASE LEVEL (cont.)	Grade Level for Assessment						
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
Punctuation (continued)							
8. Uses hyphen for dividing word at end of a line.						O	.X
9. Underlines book titles.							TX
Format Skills							
1. Completes forms requesting name, age, phone number, address.				TN	F		M
2. Writes the address and return address on envelopes.				M	F,TN		
LANGUAGE							
Usage							
1. Distinguishes common/proper nouns.					TN	L	O
2. Uses singular/plural noun forms.			F	TN	TN		
3. Uses appropriate singular possessive pronouns.				L			
4. Uses appropriate plural possessive pronouns.							L
5. Uses articles appropriately.				L			
Diction							
1. Uses specific rather than general terms.						O	TX
2. Uses terms that evokes sensory perception.						L,O	M,G
3. Uses terms that designate location.		L					

SKILLS AT THE WORD/PHRASE LEVEL (cont.)	Grade Level for Assessment						
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
Diction (continued)							
4. Uses terms that describe color.		L					
5. Uses terms that describe emotions.		L		M			
6. Uses terms that describe shape and size.				L			
7. Uses synonyms/antonyms.			G	TN			
8. Uses transitional words of time in a story: before, after, next, when.				TX			
9. Uses denotative/connotative word meaning.						G	

SKILLS AT THE SENTENCE LEVEL	Grade Level for Assessment						
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
HANDWRITING							
Manuscript							
1. Writes sentences from dictation.		O	TN				
2. Writes simple sentences in manuscript with correct letter formation and spacing between words.		G,O TN	L,F	TX			
3. Writes with reasonable speed in manuscript form.			TN	L			
Cursive							
1. Writes sentences from dictation.							TN
2. Writes with reasonable speed in cursive form.							TN, TX
SPELLING							
Miscellaneous							
1. Spells homophones.				TN	O		
MECHANICS							
Capitalization							
1. Capitalizes first word in sentences.		G	F, TN,O				
Punctuation							
1. Uses period to end declarative sentences.		G	F,TN O	L,M, TX			
2. Uses period to end imperative sentences.			TN	M	L		

SKILLS AT THE SENTENCE LEVEL (cont.)	Grade Level for Assessment						
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
Punctuation (continued)							
3. Uses question mark to end interrogative sentences.		G	F,TN O	L,M, TX			
4. Uses exclamation point to end exclamatory sentences.			TN	L,M TX		O	
5. Uses comma to separate items in a series.					O,L	TN	M
6. Uses comma in direct address.						O,TN	TX,M
7. Uses comma to separate elements of a sentence: words, phrases, clauses.						TN,O	TX
8. Uses semicolon.							TN
9. Uses parentheses.							M
LANGUAGE							
Usage							
1. Writes sentences in standard word order.				TX	F	G	
2. Uses correct word order for modifiers: adjective-noun; verb-adverb.							L
3. Writes sentences in which the subject and verb agree.						G	L,TX
4. Uses appropriate nominative/ objective pronoun forms.				L,TN			
5. Uses inflected forms of regular verbs.			F	TN		G	
6. Uses inflected forms of irregular verbs.					O,TN	TN,G	

SKILLS AT THE SENTENCE LEVEL (cont.)	Grade Level for Assessment						
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
Usage (continued)							
7. Uses adjectives.				G	TN		
8. Uses comparative and superlative adjective forms.					G		
9. Uses adverbs.				G		TN	
10. Uses conjunctions.				L			
Grammatical Knowledge							
1. Identifies types of sentences:							
a. declarative			G	TN,L	F,O		
b. interrogative				TN,L	F,O		L
c. imperative							O
d. exclamatory.						O	
2. Identifies subject and predicate.						TN	O,L
3. Identifies noun phrases in sentences.					G		
4. Identifies verb phrases in sentences.					G		
5. Identifies parts of speech in sentences.							TN,O
6. Uses appropriate parts of speech in sentences.				TN			
7. Identifies complete sentences as opposed to fragments.				G	O	L	TX, TN
8. Identifies run-on sentences.							M,TX
Sentence Production							
1. Writes simple sentences.			TN				
2. Writes compound sentences.					L	TN	TX
3. Writes complex sentences.							TX
4. Expands sentences using single-word modifiers.							G, L,O
5. Expands sentences using clauses.							O,M

SKILLS AT THE PARAGRAPH LEVEL	Grade Level for Assessment						
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
MECHANICS							
Capitalization							
1. Capitalizes first word in dialogue quotations.					O		
Punctuation							
1. Uses quotation marks for dialogue.						TN,O	TX,M
2. Uses comma in dialogue quotations.							TX,M
LANGUAGE							
Techniques							
1. Uses transition between paragraphs/within paragraphs.							M,G
Paragraph Production							
1. Organizes a series of sentences into a paragraph.				L	F,O,G		TX, TN
2. Indents first word of paragraphs.				G			TN, TX
3. Writes topic sentences.						G	
4. Writes supporting sentences for topic sentences.				TN,M	F	TN	O

SKILLS AT THE DISCOURSE LEVEL	Grade Level for Assessment						
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
GENERAL DISCOURSE							
Planning							
1. Limits the topic when given a general subject.					O,G		TX
2. Writes notes on a topic.							O
3. Constructs a topic outline.					G		M,TN, O
Elaborating							
1. Writes titles.							TN
2. Uses consistent verb tense.							TX
3. Uses appropriate formal/informal language.						G	TX
Proofreading and Editing							
1. Proofreads paragraphs for final copy.				TX	G		TN, TX
WRITING TYPES							
Descriptive Writing Skills							
1. Arranges description in spatial order.					G		TX
Descriptive Writing Products							
1. Writes descriptions of persons, places, or things.				TX		L,G	
2. Writes thank-you notes.			G	TN		O	
Narrative Writing Skills							
1. Arranges narrative events in chronological order.					G		TX,L

SKILLS AT THE DISCOURSE LEVEL (cont.)	Grade Level for Assessment						
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
Narrative Writing Skills (continued)							
2. Uses language appropriate to the tone and mood of stories.							TX
3. Completes open-ended stories.							L
Narrative Writing Products							
1. Writes personal narratives.			G	TX		O	
2. Writes imaginative stories.				O	G		L
3. Writes biographies.						G	TX
4. Writes plays.				M	G		
Expository Writing Skills							
1. Arranges factual content in order of importance.							TX
2. Arranges factual content for comparison/contrast.						L,G	TX
Expository Writing Products							
1. Writes summaries.					G	TN,O	TX,M
2. Writes directions.							M,TN
3. Writes messages.					F	L	
4. Writes news articles.				M			TX
5. Writes minutes of meetings.							G
6. Writes invitations.			F,G		TN	O	
7. Writes announcements.			F	G	TN	O	
Persuasive Writing Skills							
1. Writes on the same topic from different viewpoints.						G	

SKILLS AT THE DISCOURSE LEVEL (cont.)	Grade Level for Assessment						
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
Persuasive Writing Products							
1. Writes advertisements.							TX
2. Writes television/radio commercials.							TX
3. Writes editorials.						G	
4. Writes critical reviews.							TX, TN
Format-Oriented Products							
1. Writes personal letters.		G		M	F,TN	O	
2. Writes business letters.						G	M, TN,O
3. Writes journals.				L,M		G	TX
4. Writes lists.							L
POETRY							
1. Writes poems.				O,G			
2. Writes limericks.				M			
3. Writes free verse.				M			
4. Writes haiku poems.				M			